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THE STORY OF THE RUNAWAY BALLOON.

In the year 1858 the Illinois State Fair was held at Centralia, September 14 to 17 inclusive. The St. Louis Republican of September 15, speaks of the magnitude of the Illinois Fair as follows:

“The opening of the Illinois State Fair yesterday at Centralia must have been exceedingly gratifying to the friends of the Association under whose auspices the Fair is held, and especially so to those who resolutely insisted on giving the sixth Fair to Southern Illinois. The interest taken in it is evidently greater than has ever been displayed in an Illinois Fair. It promises to be more important in its bearing upon the agricultural interests of the State than any previous gathering for like purposes. The display of blooded cattle is four times as large as that at the St. Louis Fair, and, by Kentucky and Illinois breeders, is pronounced the largest and finest display of the kind ever seen in the West or Southwest. Judges of horseflesh say, too, that they have never in the State at any Fair seen so remarkable a collection of fine horses. Some of the judges at the St. Louis Fair are there, and their opinion is that if number and quality are taken into consideration, the Illinois State Fair must take the blue ribbon. The collection of swine of every breed, of natives of the most approved stock is large; so also of sheep. The mule show thus far is limited. So also is the mechanical department, but the show of agricultural implements is the largest ever presented by the Association. Both the President and Secretary of the Association, Messrs. Webster and Francis, say that in the particulars above mentioned, the State, and particularly Southern Illinois, have reason to be perfectly satisfied and to indulge no little degree of pride. The farmers are pouring in from every direction, by railroad train, in wagons and on horseback.

Strangers are here from all parts of the State and from a dozen different States. The grounds are admirably adapted to the purposes of the Fair. Accommodations have been provided on an extensive scale for all who come. The conveniences for supplying meals to the visitors are such that 600 persons can be seated and fed every fifteen minutes. This is exclusive of outside arrangements. Comfortable straw beds and good bunks are numerous enough for the people of a city of considerable size. The novelty of attending such a Fair in a country district, away from all cities and towns of any size, is one of the pleasing inducements to attend.

The finest opportunity is offered for the display of fine horses and stock. The ring or trotting course is a quarter of a mile in circumference, and the track one hundred feet wide. Trials of speed worth seeing by horse fanciers will come off there every day this week. Many of the premium horses and cattle of the St. Louis Fair are at the Illinois Fair, their owners have made a very superb display of the silverware they received, in the business office of the Association.

It is to be hoped that occasion will be taken by many in St. Louis and vicinity to go over to the Fair at Centralia. By taking the morning train on the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad they can be in Centralia by 11 o'clock, and return at night. By all means, however, let them go to pass a night on the ground. The moonlight is delightful, the pleasant walks are numerous, the shady grove skirting the ground is a charming spot by day or by night, and whoever goes will come back amply repaid for the trip. We shall furnish daily reports of the Fair of a general character—sufficiently minute, however, to satisfy all exhibitors of premium stock."

The people were greatly interested in balloon ascensions which were features of the Fair. When the balloon was at rest on the farm of Benjamin B. Harvey, after a flight, Mr. Harvey and his children gathered around to see the balloon, and the youngsters climbed into it with all the zest of explorers,

and in some manner, while the children were in it, the balloon became loose and soared away, carrying the children with it. Our older citizens remember the excitement occasioned by the flight of the children. The Historical Society has received several requests for information in regard to the incident, and the future fortunes of the Harvey children. An account of the affair was published in the Transactions of the State Board of Agriculture for 1858. It is here reprinted. It tells the story of the runaway balloon, but, of course, gives no account of the after-life of the children. It has been sixty-four years since those children had that thrilling experience. Does anyone know anything of their after-life. The Historical Society will be grateful for information about them.

THE ASCENSION OF THE TWO HARVEY CHILDREN.

BY SAMUEL WILSON, THE BALLOONIST.

As there have been several different accounts published about the balloon ascension of the two children, after my aerial voyage from Centralia, and most of them very incorrect, I have concluded to give the facts as they occurred.

Mr. Brooks, being indisposed, permitted me to take his place, which I cheerfully accepted. As the balloon passed rapidly upward, I was carried to the northwest, until I reached the height of nearly two miles. Meeting with an eastward current, I was wafted slowly over the Fair Grounds, and remained nearly fifteen minutes directly over Central City. I then discharged several pounds of ballast, and ascended a mile higher, where I found a stronger current blowing to the eastward. I could now distinctly see the Mississippi, with several steamboats floating on its bosom. Centralia, which is about one mile and a half from the Fair Grounds, appeared but a few rods, and the cars seemed to move with the speed of an ox team. The largest prairies were diminished to good-sized farms. The whole country for a hundred miles around, with

its rivers, towns, fields and forests, looked like an immense concave map spread beneath me.

Soon after witnessing one of the most splendid sunsets my eyes ever rested upon, I found myself slowly descending upon a large forest. I regretted very much to find the ascension power giving out so soon, as I had anticipated a long and pleasant journey by moonlight. In fact, I had prepared myself with sufficient clothing to reach the Atlantic Ocean, if the aerostat would carry me there.

After feasting for an hour upon one of the most gorgeous views that nature in all her loveliness can present, I amused myself by perusing some newspapers that were given to me to distribute on the way.

I threw out ballast when I had descended within half a mile of the earth, and soon went up to the height of three miles, where I remained until near dark, when the power of my machine again gave out, as it was not well coated with varnish; and I descended in a field on the farm of Benjamin B. Harvey, about seventeen miles from Centralia, and three from Rome. The grappling iron caught in a small tree, and Mr. Harvey and son came to my assistance. They then took hold of the anchor rope and drew the aerostat, while I remained in the car, to the house. Mr. Harvey's family and some of the neighbors soon collected around the balloon, and seemed as much astonished as the Digger Indians and the descendants of Montezuma were at my ascensions from Mexico and California. As they had never seen the "elephant" or rode on his back, some of them concluded to take a ride in the balloon. Accordingly, the anchor was made fast to the fence. Mr. Harvey mounted the car, while his sons and some of the neighbors let him up a few feet by holding on the rope. I warned them several times to hold fast to the rope, as the airship might slip her anchor and leave them in the lurch.

After Mr. Harvey had satisfied his curiosity in balloon riding, he placed his three youngest children—two girls and a little boy—in the car. While he and his sons managed the

balloon I stepped to one side to converse with the ladies, who were asking me many questions about my aerial voyage. After the three children had remained in the car a few moments, Mr. Harvey took out the oldest daughter, which gave the balloon so much power that it jerked away from them and the fence in an instant, and in a minute was out of sight, leaving us completely overcome with fear and amazement at an accident of so novel and thrilling a character. The emotions of the parents may be more easily imagined than described when they heard them cry, "Mother, let me down; mother, let me down," until they had disappeared apparently among the stars, and could be heard and seen no more. I informed them that the balloon was not very tight and would come down, I thought, in one or two hours, and not go more than ten or twenty miles away, as there was but little or no wind at the time. Although it went toward the northwest when it ascended, I told them I thought it would go east, in the same direction in which I came from Centralia. I informed them that there would be no danger of the children falling out of the car, as the ropes were too numerous and close. The most I feared was that they might come down in a large forest and not be easily found. I advised them to arouse the neighborhood for at least ten miles around, particularly to the east, as I believed the balloon would go in that direction. Mr. Harvey gave me his horse to ride back to Centralia to have the news sent by telegraph and railroad in every direction. I reached Centralia about 12 o'clock at night, and in the morning had an extra published and the news spread as soon as possible. Mr. Knowles and I went in search of them on Saturday, and were told by different persons that the balloon was seen passing toward the west in different places from 8 to 10 o'clock at night. Saturday evening it was reported that they were found safe several miles from where they went up, but it was not known to a certainty where they were found—at Centralia—until Sunday morning, when it was ascertained that they had safely descended about eighteen miles southeast

of Mr. Harvey's, near Mr. Atchison's house, suspended in the air, the anchor having caught in a tree.

Saturday morning Mr. Atchison had got up early to look at the comet, or "blazing star," as he termed it, and discovered the balloon, when the little girl called to him to pull them down, telling him to do it "easily." The little boy was found asleep. The little girl said her brother complained of being cold when they were very high.

She did not pull the valve-string. The balloon remained in the air, probably longer than I did, as it had more ascensive power in proportion to its weight.

A brother of the children gave me their names and ages—Martha Ann being eight and David three years.

The joyful news reached their parents about 2 o'clock on Saturday, and the children came home the same evening, on which occasion the rejoicing must have been equal to the sorrow which had so lately preceded it.

* From "Transactions of the Illinois State Agricultural Society," Vol. 3, 1858-59, pp. 92-93.